

A C T I V I T Y

Should the Senate Be More Representative?

One of the major compromises in the Constitutional Convention was between the small states and big states. The small states wanted each state to have the same number of representatives in Congress. The big states wanted representation based on population. The compromise was to have one house of Congress (the House of Representatives) base its representation on population (with each state having at least one representative) and for each state to have two senators in the other house (the Senate) regardless of population.

This compromise has worked for more than 200 years. But critics claim that the Senate is undemocratic because it gives each state two senators regardless of population. Political writer Timothy Noah points out that “50 senators representing the 25 smallest states, and hence a mere 16 percent of the population, could . . . block passage of a bill favored by the other 84 percent of the population.”

Divide the class into small groups. Imagine that your group is a commission asked to make recommendations on the Senate. Do the following:

1. Read and discuss the section titled “Representation in Congress.”
2. Discuss what the advantages are to having the Senate as it is.
3. Discuss what the disadvantages are.
4. Decide on one of these options: (a) Leave the Senate as it is, (b) Make the Senate based on population, or (c) Make up your own option.
5. Be prepared to report your decision and reasons for it to the class.